REMARKS

Entry of the amendments to the specification, claims and abstract before examination of the application is respectfully requested. The claims have been amended to conform to U.S. practice.

If there are any questions regarding this Preliminary Amendment or the application in general, a telephone call to the undersigned would be appreciated since this should expedite the prosecution of the application for all concerned.

If necessary to effect a timely response, this paper should be considered as a petition for an Extension of Time sufficient to effect a timely response, and please charge any deficiency in fees or credit any overpayments to Deposit Account No. 05-1323 (Docket # 028972.56011US).

Respectfully submitted,

March 24, 2005

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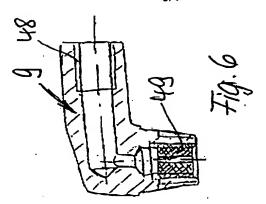
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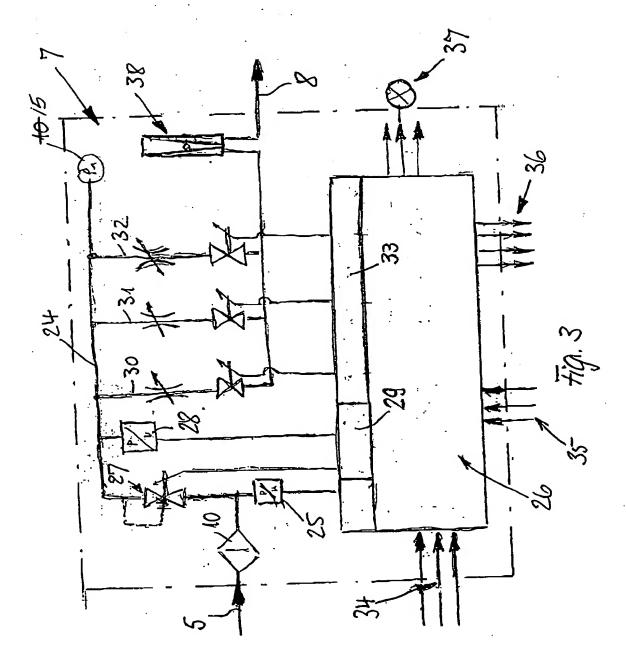
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Amendment to the Drawings:

Approval of the attached amendment to Fig. 3, which is marked in red ink, is requested.

MOTHER STATE





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PCT/EP2003/010450

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Marked version

JC17 Rec'd PCT/PTO 24 MAR 2005

SHIELDING PROTECTIVE GAS DEVICE FOR PRESSURE DIE-CASTING MACHINES

[0001] This is a National Phase Application based on PCT/EP2003/010450, filed

September 19, 2003 and claims the priority of German Application 020 21 445.8,

filed September 25, 2002 the disclosure of which is expressly incorporated by

reference herein.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The invention relates to a shielding gas device for pressure die-casting

machines, in particular for processing magnesium melts, with a melting furnace

having openings for supplying the shielding gases, and having various gas sources

and a container situated downstream therefrom for receiving a mixture of the

individual shielding gas components which is connected via at least one metering

device to the openings in the melting furnace.

[0003] To prevent the reaction of magnesium with oxygen present in the air, the

magnesium melts contained in the melting furnaces of pressure die-casting

machines must be blanketed by an inert gas mixture. For this purpose, mixtures of

carrier gases and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆) or sulfur dioxide (SO₂) must be used,

such as for example N₂ and SF₆, dry air and SF₆, or dry air and SO₂. The aim is to

keep the concentration of the inert gas portion of the mixture as low as possible.

- 1 -

[0004] In the known devices for producing the inert gas mixture, the individual

components are filled into a container by quantified feeding at relatively low

pressure (0.8 to 1.5 bar), from which container the gas mixture is withdrawn and

supplied to the melt surface.

[0005] In the devices currently known, the type of mixing process generally

results in layering, or there is no assurance that layering does not occur. Layer

formation may also occur when the gas has not been properly mixed and then

settles due to gravity. A homogeneous mixture is not formed. When the gas is

withdrawn, the resulting fluctuations in concentration influence the inert effect. An

excessively low inert gas concentration results in combustion, while an excessively

high concentration results in corrosion effects in the melting furnace and the

casting unit, in addition to unnecessarily high pollutant emissions.

[0006] The gas mixture is supplied to the furnace through one or more inlet

openings having the lowest possible flow resistance, the quantity to be metered

being adjusted via the volumetric flow rate. If multiple inlet openings are connected

to one metering unit, great variation in the metering results which is independent

of the spacing between the openings.

[0007] If the inlet openings are combined as a group and connected to different

metering devices, for one or more furnaces, for example, changes in the metering to

- 2 -

Marked version

one inlet opening affect the metering to the other inlet openings. Adjustment is very

difficult as a rule. As a result, localized over- or undermetering in the furnace can

also occur in this manner. Regions of SF₆ accumulation and areas of SF₆ depletion,

referred to as concentration shadows, may appear above the melt in the furnace

chamber. In the known designs, if a change in the metering is desired, such as for

different operating modes (normal operation, cleaning, emergency mode), the

adjustment must be determined and set in each case. The quantity of gases to be

mixed must be adjusted to the respective operating state in a complicated

procedure.

[0008] The object of the present invention, therefore, is to design a shielding gas

device of the aforementioned type so that the shielding gas impinges on the melts in

a simple and interference-free manner and the above-referenced problems are

avoided. To achieve this object in a shielding gas device of the aforementioned type,

it is provided that the container is a pressure accumulator, the openings in the

melting furnace are supplied with inlet nozzles, and these inlet nozzles are

impinged on by a metering device, the operating pressure of which is equal to or less

than the pressure in the pressure accumulator, but in any case is high enough to

atomize the shielding gas mixture downstream from the inlet nozzles.

[0009] In the embodiment of the invention, the metering process may be

performed continuously or discontinuously, i.e., in a pulsating manner. In the latter

- 3 -

Marked version

case, for intermittent impingement of the inlet nozzle, small quantities may also be

metered in a controlled manner without the risk that atomization then no longer

occurs due to excessively low pressure. In order for atomization to take place in a

system, it is known that two requirements must be met:

[0010] First, a certain pressure, and second, a certain volume are required by

which a dynamic pressure is established by the nozzle. If the volume is so low that

this dynamic pressure cannot be maintained, the atomization effect would also be

absent. For this reason the metering device according to the invention is able to

adjust the gas intermittently, i.e., in a pulsating manner, and therefore can further

reduce the average quantity of gas introduced, although the system still functions

in gassing mode. Mechanical adjustment of the nozzles themselves to this lowest-

quantity metering is therefore not necessary.

[0011] This design achieves a rapid and uniform distribution over the melt so

that concentration shadows or accumulations of shielding gas do not occur. In one

refinement of the invention, the inlet nozzles are distributed on the melting furnace

in such a way that gas flows to the leakage points that are present anyway, thereby

ensuring a uniform concentration distribution. As used here, "leakage points" refers

to all intended and unintended openings in the furnace, such as charge openings,

cleaning openings, and actual sites of leaks, for example. The inlet nozzles are also

configured in such a way that they are protected from contamination or plugging.

- 4 -

Marked version

[0012] The operating pressure of the metering device, which is held constant, is

adapted to the type of inlet nozzles, and thus also to the desired distribution

principle of the gas mixture in the furnace. For this purpose, it is naturally

advantageous to also monitor the inlet pressure at the metering unit, i.e., the

pressure in the pressure accumulator, so that the operating pressure for the

metering device can be maintained. If the pressure drops for any reason, the

metering unit can be switched to emergency gassing via corresponding signals

which also actuate optical displays, and the gas outlet can be opened.

[0013] As a result of regulating the operating pressure, the metering, i.e., the

desired quantity of gas, is totally independent of other users of the same gas mixing

unit. In this manner, different groups of inlet nozzles may be operated via multiple

metering units without interference. Resetting the quantity supplied to one group of

inlet nozzles does not affect the quantity supplied to the other group, and also has

no influence on the mixture formation, i.e., the concentration of the shielding gas.

[0014] In this way, in the embodiment of the invention multiple metering devices

may be connected in parallel, even for different furnaces, and fed by the pressure

accumulator. Each metering unit may be provided with a device for adjusting the

metered quantity, and in a simple manner an operating mode sensor is associated

with each metering unit by which the operator can determine the metered quantity.

In one refinement of the invention, each metering unit may also be provided with a

- 5 -

Marked version

control logic system that receives signals concerning the furnace status. The

shielding gas concentration may also be automatically regulated in this manner.

[0015] In the embodiment of the invention, upstream from the pressure

accumulator a mixing device having a mixing chamber is provided in which the

gases forming the shielding gas mixture are combined under pressure. The system

pressure in this mixing device may be coordinated with the operating pressure of

the metering devices. The system pressure in the mixing device must be selected to

be sufficiently higher than the operating pressure of the mixing devices.

[0016] In the embodiment of the invention, pressure nozzles for feeding the gases

to be mixed may also be provided on the mixing chamber, whereby the feed lines to

the mixing chamber are associated with respective pressure regulating devices, and

it is also possible to provide pressure regulators for maintaining equal pressure to

achieve balanced pressure regulation between the carrier gas and the shielding gas.

[0017] This embodiment has the advantage that the gases to be mixed, i.e., the

components of the shielding gas, are provided in the mixing chamber under

turbulent flow in the set mixing ratio, and are then fed to the pressure container.

Gas mixing occurs without supplying electrical power. Thus, even in a power outage

the precise mixture can be produced as long as sufficient quantities of gases to be

mixed are available. The concentration is not changed thereby. Thus, the mixing

- 6 -

Marked version

device and metering device system is also able to maintain the precise

concentration, even in a power outage. Only the metered quantity is based on fixed

settings for continuously metered emergency gassing quantities. Emergency

operation can be conducted in situations without power, which of course are

indicated by signal devices.

[0018] As already mentioned, a mixing device with a pressure accumulator can

supply multiple metering units which impinge on either different inlet nozzle

groups on one furnace or on multiple furnaces, the metered quantities of which are

independent of one another. Changing the operating state of one melting furnace,

and thus making necessary changes to its metering, has no effect on the other

melting furnaces.

[0019] As previously mentioned, the pressure in the pressure accumulator is

monitored, and for this purpose a pressure monitoring device may be provided, for

example in the connecting line between the mixing chamber and the pressure

accumulator.

[0020] Lastly, in a further embodiment of the invention a gas analyzer may be

associated with the mixing chamber, by which the concentration of the gas mixture

may be monitored. This gas analyzer is able to compare the gas mixture in the

mixing chamber to a reference gas mixture in a simple manner, and when there are

- 7 -

deviations, to send a signal to the mixing device, thus enabling the feeding of gases to be mixed to be controlled.

[0021] Other objects, advantages and novel features of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of the invention when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

[0022] The invention is explained below in one exemplary embodiment with reference to the drawings, as follows:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0023] FIG 1 shows a block diagram of a shielding gas device according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0024] FIG 2 shows the schematic illustration of the mixing device used in the shielding gas device of FIG 1;

[0025] FIG 3 shows the schematic illustration of a metering device from FIG 1;

[0026] FIG 4 shows a schematic longitudinal section through the melting furnace of FIG 1;

[0027] FIG 5 shows the top view of the melting furnace of FIG 4; and

[0028] FIG 6 shows an enlarged view of one of the inlet nozzles, provided for the shielding gas impingement, from FIGS 4 and 5.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG 1 shows a melting furnace 1, the outlines of which are indicated by [0029]dashed-dotted lines, the melt bath of which is to be blanketed with shielding gas. This melting furnace 1 is illustrated in detail in FIGS 4 and 5, and is described at greater length in the discussion of those figures. The gas mixing and metering unit provided for impinging the melting furnace 1 with shielding gas comprises primarily a gas mixing unit 2, the design of which is illustrated in FIG 2. The shielding gas used, i.e., SF6 or SO2, as indicated by arrow 3, and a carrier gas, for example N₂, as indicated by arrow 4, are fed to this gas mixing unit. Admixture of these two components occurs under pressure, to be explained in detail below with reference to FIG 2. The shielding gas mixture thus formed is then held in a pressure accumulator inside the gas mixing unit, and from there shielding gas is fed via connecting lines 5 and 6 to metering devices 7 and 7a, respectively. The design of these metering devices may be seen in FIG 3. Additional metering devices may be connected to the continuing line 6'. The shielding gas is led from the respective metering devices 7 and 7a, via connecting lines 8 and 8a, to inlet nozzles 9 and 9a, and at that point enters the chamber of the melting furnace 1 above the melt. This is described in detail with reference to FIGS 4 and 5.

Marked version

[0030] FIG 2 shows that the shielding gas, SF₆, for example, is led through

connection 3, and carrier gas, N2, for example, is led through connection 4 in the gas

mixing unit 2, both gases to be mixed passing through a respective filter 10 in lines

11 and 12. Inlet pressure monitoring 14 is performed by a central monitoring logic

system 13, and the pressure in these inlet lines 11 and 12 is displayed by

corresponding manometer systems 15. A pneumatic balanced pressure regulator 16

is used to maintain the pressure of the supplied gases to be mixed at the same level

in both feed lines 11 and 12. The gases are maintained at a pressure of at least 5

bar.

[0031] The concentration of shielding gas led through the line 11 is adjusted at

location 17. A corresponding throttle site 18 is situated in the parallel feed line 12

for the carrier gas, and both pressure lines 11 and 12 lead to a mixing chamber 19

in which both gases respectively exit under pressure from nozzles 20, resulting in a

homogeneous mixture in the turbulent flow thus produced. This homogeneous gas

mixture is then led via line 22 to a pressure accumulator 21, the pressure of which

is controlled by an outlet pressure monitor 23 in the monitoring logic system 13 and

in turn is displayed by a manometer 15. In this manner a homogeneous mixed gas is

stored in the pressure accumulator 21 independent of the inlet pressure (4-5 bar in

this instance), and can then be passed through the continuing line 5 to one or more

metering devices 7.

- 10 -

PCT/EP2003/010450 Attorney Docket No. 028972.56011US Marked version

[0032] FIG 3 shows as an exemplary embodiment the metering device 7 of FIG 1,

to which the mixed gas is fed under pressure through line 5.

[0033] Here as well, a filter 10 is provided upstream from a continuing line 24,

the pressure of which is monitored by the device 25 and a central metering logic

system and monitoring device 26, and which is also centrally set to a specified

operating pressure, approximately in the range of 1.8 to 3.0 bar, by devices 27 and

28 and the central control 29. This pressure may be displayed by a manometer 15

10. In the exemplary embodiment, three lines 30, 31 and 32 branch off from line 24,

it being optionally possible to connect these lines for passing the gas mixture

further to the outlet line 8 so that in each case a different quantity of gas is allowed

to flow out. A device 33 for determining the particular operating mode, i.e., for

determining the metering, is provided in the central metering logic system 26,

whereby in one practical embodiment various sensors may be provided which are

actuatable by the operator. These sensors are indicated by the arrows 34.

[0034] The central metering logic system is also provided with signal inputs 35

from the pressure die-casting machine and from the melting furnace 1.

Corresponding signal outputs to the furnace and to the pressure die-casting

machine are indicated by the arrows 36. The central metering logic system also has

a device 37 for signaling the operating state and displaying any malfunctions. In the

- 11 -

exemplary embodiment, the outlet line 8 is provided with an optical display device 38 for displaying the flow rate.

It may be clearly seen from FIGS 4 and 5 that the melting furnace 1 [0035]shown in the exemplary embodiment has a withdrawal chamber 39 and a storage chamber 40 that are separated by a wall 41. Both chambers contain melt up to level 42, and the space 43 and 43a above the melt level is impinged on by the shielding gas mixture. The melt withdrawal device 44—a heat chamber pressure die-casting machine—is situated in the withdrawal chamber 39 in a known manner. Pressure lines 8 and 8a, which lead the shielding gas mixture to inlet nozzles 9 and 9a, respectively, in this instance are associated with withdrawal chamber 39 (pressure line 8) and melt chamber 40 (pressure line 8a). The inlet nozzles 9 for the withdrawal, as shown in FIG 5, are positioned upstream from the melt withdrawal device 44 in such a way that the gas mixture, which is exiting under pressure and expanding, passes in a flow around the melt withdrawal device 44 to the cleaning opening 45 situated above the withdrawal chamber 39, thus forming an unavoidable leakage point in the chamber 43. Through the configuration of the pressure nozzles and the geometric distribution of these nozzles 9, which are matched to the geometry of the withdrawal chamber, uniform flow in the space 43 is achieved, thus making it possible to avoid concentration shadows or localized excessive concentrations of the shielding gas.

Marked version

[0036] The same applies for the storage chamber 40, whose space 43a situated

above the melt level 42 is impinged on by the pressure nozzles 9a, which in this

instance are laterally situated at a greater distance from one another in space 43a

on the side that is opposite from the cleaning and charge opening 46. In this

manner, as indicated by arrows 47 in each case, uniform flow is also achieved in the

space 43a, which, together with the selected pressure impingement through the

inlet nozzles 9, 9a, provides a uniform shielding gas concentration above the melt

level.

[0037] FIG 6 shows as an example of one of these pressure inlet nozzles 9, which

is provided with a screw thread 48 for attachment to corresponding pressure lines,

and with a throttle 49 or orifice, downstream from which the gas flowing out under

pressure undergoes atomization, thereby providing turbulent homogenization for a

uniform distribution in spaces 43 and 43a.

[0038] Of course, shielding gas impingement according to the invention is also

possible for other types of furnaces, such as single-chamber furnaces, for example,

or for furnaces that are not used for heat chamber pressure die-casting machines.

The foregoing disclosure has been set forth merely to illustrate the invention and is

not intended to be limiting. Since modifications of the disclosed embodiments

incorporating the spirit and substance of the invention may occur to persons skilled

- 13 -

PCT/EP2003/010450 Attorney Docket No. 028972.56011US Marked version

in the art, the invention should be construed to include everything within the scope of the appended claims and equivalents thereof.